



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John E. Brooks

## State Senate Dems Tout Bill to Aid Dependents of Fallen Vets Pay for College

MARTIN C. EVANS April 15, 2019

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*Originally published in [Newsday](#) on April 16, 2019*

State Senate Democrats from Long Island visited a Lindenhurst veterans hall Monday to tout a legislative proposal aimed at expanding college aid for dependents of military personnel killed or permanently injured while on duty.

The proposal comes amid Albany Republicans' accusations that Assembly Democrats were disloyal toward veterans after blocking a Republican-backed bill that similarly endorsed scholarships for military dependents, but offered no way to pay for them.

Led by Democratic lawmakers, the Assembly's Higher Education Committee voted 15-11 last week to table the Republican proposal — known as the “Hawley Bill,” effectively killing it.

The measure would have expanded the state's Military Enhanced Recognition Incentive and Tribute (MERIT) scholarship program — which already provides up to \$24,250 in college aid to dependents of military personnel killed or disabled in combat — to include the dependents of personnel killed or permanently disabled wherever they were on duty.

Democrats said they did not support the Republican proposal because it was released after legislators passed the state's \$175 billion budget April 1, meaning it would have no source of funding even if it were signed into law.

Democratic legislators said their college aid proposal would go into effect April 1, 2020, presumably giving lawmakers time to include additional spending for military family scholarships in next year's budget.

“It's shameful, to be honest with you, that an issue of this importance was used for pure politics,” said Sen. John E. Brooks (D-Seaford) at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7279 in Lindenhurst. “Never, ever, ever were Gold [Star] families at risk of losing that support.”

Democrats were apparently smarting from the effects of a Republican media blitz launched after the committee vote. The GOP media campaign accused Democrats of failing “to honor our nation’s fallen heroes.”

“This takes hypocrisy to a whole new level,” Assemb. Mike LiPetri (R-Massapequa) said about the Democratic proposal in an April 9 news release. “When does a Democrat, especially one from New York City, ever complain about how much something costs?”

Kirby Hannan, statewide legislative advocate for the VFW, said that while "the optics looked bad" after Democrats refused to back the Republican bill, he was satisfied with Democratic Senate proposal.

“I’m happy that the legislation is recognizing the children of deceased veterans,” Hannan said. “And if the bill has to wait until next year to put the money in, I’m ok with that.”

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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## 2019-S5187

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly

- On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly

- Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Provides free tuition expenses for dependent family members of N.Y. state military personnel

April 12, 2019

In Senate Committee Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs

Sponsored by John E. Brooks

Do you support this bill?